

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Paul's Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

St Paul's Road, West Dorking, RH4 2HS

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Guildford</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Surrey
Date of inspection	29 September 2017
Date of last inspection	03 December 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 125171
Acting headteacher	Deirdre Malia
Inspector's name and number	Dr Trevor Walker (908)

#### School context

St. Paul's CE is larger than most primary schools. It primarily serves the parish of St. Paul's Church, Dorking. Most pupils are of a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as a second language, and the proportion that receive SEN support, is well below the national average. The proportion receiving pupil premium funding is low. Although the staff team has changed little in the last few years, the school currently has an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. The new religious education co-ordinator has been recently appointed to the school.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Paul's as a Church of England school are good

- Collective worship has high status and makes a positive contribution to religious understanding and personal spirituality.
- The school's ethos is very inclusive and this offers dignity and value to all members of the school community.
- Religious education makes an important contribution to the Christian character of the school.
- Partnership with the parish church is a significant strength of the school and this has notable impact in terms of chaplaincy, teaching and governance.
- Governance and leadership are systematically exploring what needs to be done to ensure continued success as a church school.

#### Areas to improve

- Embed a shared definition and understanding of spirituality to ensure that pupils can deepen their experience as they progress through the school.
- Develop RE teaching by considering the use of more open questioning and focused formative assessment.
- Increase pupils' involvement in planning and leading collective worship.
- Continue to revise and develop the school's Christian vision and values so that they pervade every aspect of school life.

### **The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners**

The Christian character of St Paul's drives an inclusive ethos throughout the school community. One parent commented that there is an, 'amazing atmosphere', while another said, 'it is a very listening place where pupils feel valued'. The strong ethos shapes relationships and behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and their behaviour is excellent. They show eagerness and enthusiasm for learning, driven and nurtured by a compelling sense of personal responsibility. One parent said that, 'exceptional behaviour is the norm'. A strong focus on well-being results in good attendance and there are few persistent absences. Exclusions are rare. The school has a set of five values: caring, confidence building, creative, contribution and community. Pupils can easily recall these values and readily apply them to their attitudes and within their learning; as evidenced through governors' monitoring. However, the pupils are less certain about how the values can be applied to the biblical narrative and how they can connect them with the teachings of Jesus. Across the school, pupils' attainment is high and their progress is broadly average when compared to national averages. Disadvantaged pupils, albeit a relatively small group, do as well as similar pupils nationally. The most recent indicators are that progress is improving generally.

The school's Christian character supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Even so, opportunities to develop these elements through curriculum planning could be improved to ensure the best progression in each. In the case of spiritual development, there needs to be careful thought as to how spirituality can be defined, applied and experienced progressively through the course of the primary stages. The Christian character of the school promotes respect and a sense of social responsibility. Pupils demonstrate good social awareness through the way they express their care and concern for others, including those who are less fortunate or disabled. A small group of pupils offered mature thoughts on the plight of refugees. The school's inclusive approach to sport was supported through a visiting paralympian who focused on access through overcoming disability. She talked of determination and resilience; inspiring the pupils to succeed. Religious education (RE) makes an important contribution to the character of the schools. Nevertheless, across the curriculum, there is a need to develop further opportunities to plan work that is focused on extending pupils' understanding of the richness and challenges of diversity and difference. Pupils' understandings of Christianity as a multicultural faith is not so well developed. However, the incumbent has introduced the children to images of Jesus from other cultures and this was well received.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship has high status and this undoubtedly makes a positive contribution to the Christian character of the school. Pupils are appreciative of the opportunity to come together and learn about Christian beliefs and how followers should live out their faith in their lives. They say that they find their shared worship to be interesting, entertaining and fun; an opportunity to learn lots of things. The worship is explicitly Christian and prominence is given to biblical understanding. Accordingly, pupils have a good knowledge of biblical material and can readily recall stories and events in the old and new testaments. Class and Key Stage worship reinforces this emphasis and provides opportunities to express ideas in smaller groups. Anglican traditions are consistently introduced. In the main hall, the pupils assemble in front of an impressively crafted wooden cross. Appropriate importance is placed on developing an understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is reinforced by lighting three candles, along with an explanation, at the beginning of all acts of worship. The act observed, gave a deeper insight into the special place that worship occupies in the school. Led by the incumbent, pupils were challenged, inspired and fully engaged. Biblical material was enlivened through the appropriate use of media that successfully enhanced the message. Pupils and adults were able to develop their personal and on-going sense of spirituality.

Prayer forms an essential part of the school day. Pupils recite the Lord's Prayer and have learnt to use inventive symbolic actions to accompany the words. Outside of the worship, pupils could explain the meaning of these actions and express how this helps them in the process of remembering. During the act observed, a pupil volunteered to offer an extempore prayer, to which all assented with the traditional 'amen'. Sensitivity is shown to those of other faiths and none. One pupil said that her friend bows her head, clasps her hands and thinks about her concerns. Muslim children say that they feel comfortable in offering their prayers to Allah. While the school day has specific times for prayer, occasions for pupils to pray outside of this pattern are more limited. Currently the school does not have any well-resourced prayer spaces to extend these opportunities.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Pupils' attitude to RE demonstrates its importance in the curriculum. The school follows the Guildford Diocesan

Guidelines and RE is regarded as a core subject within the school. Pupils learn about Christianity and other religions that includes Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. The subject is given the recommended amount of time within the curriculum and achievements are in line with what could be expected of pupils of a similar age when comparing nationally. However, while standards are broadly aligned with those in the rest of the school's core curriculum, more consideration should be given, in the case of the more able, to reaching a greater depth of learning.

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is generally good. Pupils are interested in what they are learning and eager to participate in the lessons. For example a class of Year 3 pupils were observed to be fully involved in an exercise that required them to take part in decision-making based on the parable of the prodigal son. This produced some interesting discussion between the teacher and the pupils. Teachers' subject knowledge has recently been successfully enriched through working alongside the clergy of St Paul's church. Nevertheless, teaching would be further improved through the use of more searching and open-ended questioning. Equally, there should be an on-going and deeper probing of pupils' understanding through the approach to formative assessment. This should ensure that pupils' misconceptions are recognised and fully explored. Assessment needs strengthening and, sensibly, this is currently under consideration in response to recent national changes. The quality of marking is variable and needs to offer more guidance and challenge. Visitors and visits enrich the curriculum, for example, a visit by a group of the Hindu dancers. Pupils visit their parish church regularly and become increasingly familiar with the practices and patterns of worship within their local Christian community. However, while there are plans to visit other places of worship, even more could be done in terms of visits to understand the meaning and symbolism of the places where other religions worship. Older pupils receive teaching from the church youth leader based on the Bible Explorers scheme. The lively teaching provides an added dimension, helping pupils to understand and apply a working knowledge of the times and the events of the Bible. Easter pause days have been held and further opportunities of this kind are being considered in order to deepen pupils' learning, reflection and understanding.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good**

The expertise within governance is a considerable strength of the school. Governors take a strategic approach that ensures that the school meets the challenges and opportunities presented. Their determination to safeguard the continuing Christian distinctiveness of the school is evident in their actions and planning to take the school forward. The newly promoted acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have responded with enthusiasm to their respective roles. Each demonstrates excellent commitment and a resolve to build on the school's strengths. They have, moreover, quickly identified the improvements that are necessary to underpin the on-going success of the school. A pressing action, and one identified by governors and leaders, is the formulation of a biblically rooted vision statement that can be articulated by all. This is being considered in order to guarantee the school's continuing Christian distinctiveness. The current values have served the school for some time. Leaders and governors are now, and rightly so, involved in a process of revisiting and revising them in the light of recent changes and opportunities. These values have, to some extent, driven the school's policies and plans, although their revision should explore how they are able to deepen and extend their reach into every aspect of the school's life. Whilst school development planning includes elements of Christian distinctiveness, the plan needs to embrace and integrate distinctiveness across all of the planned improvements and be more explicitly underpinned by the school's values. The process of self-evaluation has not been sufficiently collective and effective. Hitherto it has been too dependent on the headteacher. A more robust model for shared enquiry and reporting is now under consideration to ensure greater involvement and more ownership of the outcomes.

Partnership with the parish church is another significant strength of the school. There is a close and productive working relationship that draws upon the expertise of the church team and community. This has notable impact in terms of the chaplaincy, teaching and governance that is offered by the team's range of talents. Recent training from the diocese regarding RE teaching has been well-received and is beginning to bear fruit, although the embedding of the anticipated improvements requires further time. Evolving partnerships with the local schools demonstrate the importance that governors give to their strategic role. The school's Christian character is a fundamental part of this consideration. Parents are extremely appreciative and very supportive of the nurturing atmosphere of the school. They feel that the school meets the needs of all of the children and their families, regardless of their particular circumstances. Examples of this include a parent whose twins have been encouraged to find their own and separate identity and a parent who was bereaved and sensitively supported through particular circumstances and challenges. From the parental view, the Christian example makes an important and telling difference. The school meets the statutory requirements for collective worship and RE.